

NBC BRIEFING

31 May 1980

~~SECRET~~
LAOS

- I. The King has asked Tiao Somsanith to form a new government. He had been the interior minister in the caretaker government which just resigned.
 - A. Somsanith, an able past supporter of former Premier Phoui, defected to the new party formed by the militantly anti-Communist Committee for Defense of National Interests (CDNI) after the April elections.
 - B. Somsanith still has to win investiture from the 59-member National Assembly, but the odds are in favor of his success. A simple majority is needed, and CDNI interests claim 32 followers.
- II. The King would probably have preferred to have named Brig. Gen. Phoumi, the CDNI strongman. His selection of Somsanith was in large part in deference to Western concern that Phoumi's designation would spark early and strong Communist reaction.
 - A. Even so, Phoumi is likely to be the dominant influence in the Somsanith government. Phoumi will probably be defense minister, and CDNI members are expected to dominate the coalition government.
- III. The Communists will not be under any illusions as to where the real power resides in the new government, but their immediate reaction may be more restrained than it would have been if Phoumi had been named.

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